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ABSTRACT

The reading process and instruction in this process must be accepted as an essential part of learning and must be integrated into the total school curriculum. However, the fact that most content area teachers have had little or no training in reading instruction and that they lack insight into the reading process and the various reading/study skills that apply to their specific areas constitutes a deterrent to their active participation and cooperation in reading instruction. One approach to this problem is to involve content area teachers in a number of participatory reading activities and then to have them discuss precisely what it is that they are being asked to do. Through this procedure, content area teachers begin to realize the following: that the reading process involves perception, language facility, cognition, interest, attitudes, motivation, experience, and background; that reading is a learned, developmental process; that students must comprehend as well as decode what they read; that reading takes meaning to the printed page as well as from it; that reading entails different levels of understanding; that efficient reading requires a flexible reading rate; that a wide range of reading ability exists at all age levels; and that the diversity of reading ability in each classroom demands diagnosis of individual students' abilities. (FL)

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The Reading Process and the Content Area Teacher

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That reading scores have declined in recent years, that numerous students are passing out of our schools into the adult world of work as functional illiterates, that many of our students go on to institutions of higher education lacking the reading/study skills which are prerequisite for academic success, that classroom teachers continue to complain of students being unable to cope with assignments which include printed matter are some of the many negative realities with which we reading specialists are continually confronted. (In some cases it might be more accurate to say we are taunted, bombarded, plagued, haunted, harassed or tormented.) Even if we should attempt to escape these realities, the media, administrators, parents, fellow teachers and taxpayers will, in no way, permit us to ignore them.

The rectification of these troublesome, unfortunate realities cannot, nor will not, be brought about by increased, larger doses of remedial reading instruction provided for students in a reading lab sequestered away in some area of a school building. The reading process and instruction in this process must be "taken out of the closet", be accepted as an essential tool for learning and be integrated into the total school curriculum. Content area teachers must become truly participatory members of a school team dedicated to overcoming reading deficiencies.

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However, neither our actively soliciting their cooperation, nor even an agreement on their part to cooperate in this effort will provide us with a total solution. Most of our content area teachers have had little or no training in the area of reading instruction and consequently fail to understand just what it is we are asking of them. Their lack of insights into the reading process and the various reading/study skills which apply to their content areas constitute deterrants to their active participation and cooperation in reading instruction.

What is it then that we can specifically offer content area teachers? What approaches or steps can we take which will facilitate their developing insights into the reading process itself and subsequent assessment and instructional devices which will contribute to continued reading growth for their students? In teaching graduate level reading courses and in conducting numerous inservice workshops in schools throughout northern California, this author has found the following approach to be one to which teachers have responded in a very positive fashion.

In the first place subject area teachers need to take a close look at the reading process, its many facets, and the variables which contribute to its continual growth and development. By involving them in a number of participatory reading activities, and having them reflect on and discuss what it is they are being asked to do, insights into and a deeper understanding of this process evolves. The choice of reading passages apropos to this type of approach which will facilitate these stated outcomes can certainly vary. The author has found that the following types have stimulated active, enjoyable involvement subsequent

positive, fruitful discussion and insights. First, a reading passage written with a set of symbols other than our own alphabet with a simple story line similar to our basal readers. (eg. The one found in a "Primer for Parents" by Paul McKee.) Second, a highly technical passage replete with difficult specialized vocabulary. (eg. A section from a college level science or medical journal.) Third, a selection written in a dialect or an approximation of a dialect, of a humorous nature, if possible. (eg. An "Italian" version of Goldilocks and the Three Bears.) Fourth, a series of sentences or short passages containing some words which are similar to their English counterparts. After silent reading time is allowed for each of these, the teachers should be asked a series of thought provoking questions which should result, at least in part, in the following realizations: 1) that the reading process involves perception, language facility, cognition, interest, attitudes, motivation, experience and background, 2) that reading is a learned, developmental process, 3) that although the ability to decode is essential to reading, the individual must be able to do more, he/she must comprehend what is read, 4) that reading is as much taking meaning to the printed page as from it, 5) that reading entails different levels of understanding, 6) that efficient reading requires a flexible reading rate, 7) that at all age levels a wide range of ability to read exists, 8) that readiness to read applies to reading at all levels, 9) that the diversity of reading ability in each classroom demands diagnosis of individual student's abilities.

Conclusions such as those enumerated above, arrived at by the teachers themselves have, in our experience, led very easily and logically to the need for the content area teachers to implement a diagnostic-prescriptive approach to reading improvement in their classrooms. Once

this stage is reached the teachers become very receptive to any tools, approaches, methods, etc. with which we can provide them. The following list constitutes the major areas of competence the author has worked to develop with such teachers:

a. the implementation and interpretation of readability formulas

b. the development, administration and interpretation of a group Informal Reading Inventory

c. the construction, administration and interpretation of the cloze procedure

d. the development, administration and interpretation of reading skill tests

e. the construction, administration and interpretation of interest inventories

f. an understanding of levels of comprehension

g. an understanding of reading levels

h. the development of suitable questioning techniques for purposes of assessment and for assisting students in developing levels of thinking/comprehension

i. the knowledge of various reading/study skills which apply to the different content areas

j. a deeper understanding of the importance of and approaches to teaching vocabulary in content areas

k. the construction and implementation of a directed reading activity in content areas

l. the construction and implementation of a study guide or an instructional framework as a means of meeting individual needs of students and developing their comprehension skills

m. the use of study techniques such as SQ3R

When working to develop these competencies stress is always laid on the need for departments or groups of teachers to cooperate with one another in developing a number of the devices listed above.

To the extent to which we can successfully train our content area teachers to cooperate with us in continually developing the reading ability of their students, will we be able to begin to correct those negative realities which were specified as we began our presentation.